

# **Social support as a form of social capital in status attainment research: an explorative study**

**Pieter-Paul Verhaeghe**

PhD. Student Sociology (FWO)  
Ghent University, Belgium

# Social capital: what?

## Social capital definition:

*The resources embedded in social networks that generate returns to actors.*

1. A capital form: the result of the investment in social relations
2. Not possessed by individuals, but captured in social relations
3. Network relationships are a necessary, but no sufficient condition
4. Generate returns to actors

# Social support as social capital?

## Types of resources:

- Information, influence, trust, social credentials...
- **Social support?**

## Social support:

- Instrumental support
- Expressive support (= emotional support and companionship)

# Social support as social capital?

## ARGUMENTS PRO

1. A capital form: the result of the investment in social relations
2. Not possessed by individuals, but captured in social relations
3. Network relationships are a necessary, but no sufficient condition
4. Generate returns to actors

- *Health returns are proven*

- ***Status attainment returns?***

# Social support as social capital?

## ARGUMENTS CONTRA

### 1. The fear argument:

An inflation of social capital concepts?

### 2. The collective nature argument:

The collective nature of social capital?

### 3. The structural position argument:

Network member's structural positions as social capital?

# Status attainment returns?

## Hypotheses

### Social resource proposition:

Social resources exert a positive effect on the outcome of an action

**H1.** Job search support has a *positive* effect on status attainment

**H2.** *Instrumental* job search support has a *positive* effect  
on status attainment

**H3.** *Expressive* job search support has a *positive* effect  
on status attainment

# Status attainment returns? Hypotheses

## Strength of ties proposition (1):

Social resources are affected by the tie strength

**Strength of weak ties:** access to a more diverse range of social resources

→ **H4.** Job search support from **weak** ties has a **greater positive** effect on status attainment than from **strong** ties

**Strength of strong ties:** higher motivation to actually help a person

→ **H5.** Job search support from **strong** ties has a **greater positive** effect on status attainment than from **weak** ties

# Status attainment returns?

## Hypotheses

### Strength of ties proposition (2):

Different social support functions are given by different types of alters:

**Weak ties:** specialized in instrumental actions

→ **H6. *Instrumental*** job search support from ***weak*** ties has a ***greater positive*** effect on status attainment than from ***strong*** ties

**Strong ties:** involved with multiple social support functions

→ **H7. *Expressive*** job search support from ***strong*** ties has a ***greater positive*** effect on status attainment than from ***weak*** ties



## 2. Data and results

- Survey among **first year university students**:
  - 2733 respondents (response rate of 44%)
- The **status of their last holiday job**
- This population and this job type is **not representative**

But it's **a conservative test**:

- Inequality in social support resources is limited
- Holiday jobs are easy to get
- Students are not selective in performing a holiday job

## 2. Data and results

### ▪ Independent variable: job search support

- Measured by a specific application of the resource generator
- Availability of resources = *perceived* job search support
- Volume of different support items
  - General job search support (0-8)
  - Instrumental job search support (0-4)
  - Expressive job search support (0-4)
- Tie strength
  - Strong ties = immediate kin & extended kin
  - Middle ties = friends
  - Weak ties = acquaintances

Here there are eight situations about the search for a (holiday) job. On which person could you rely if you need support in these situations? Several answers are possible.

1. Giving you advice about where you can search for a (holiday) job
2. Helping you with judging a certain vacancy
3. Helping you with searching for vacancies
4. Together exploring vacancies
5. Giving you self-esteem for a solicitation by a chat
6. Encouraging you to not give up searching for a (holiday) job
7. Talking about your problems during searching for a (holiday) job
8. Entertaining you when you didn't get a certain (holiday) job

**Item 1-4:** instrumental support items

**Item 5-8:** expressive support items

**Answer possibilities:** 'Immediate kin', 'Extended kin', 'Friends', 'Acquaintances', 'Nobody'

## 2. Data and results

- **Dependent variables: status of the holiday job**

- Job quality
- Hourly income (logged)

- **Controlling for**

age, gender, ethnicity, labour market position father, educational level father, and job search intensity

## 2. Data and results

	Job quality	Hourly income
Job search support	.085*	.126***
Instrumental job search support	.053	.131**
Expressive job search support	.044	.015

Standardized coefficients

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

## 2. Data and results

	Job quality	Hourly income
Job search support	.085*	.126***
Instrumental job search support	.053	.131**
Expressive job search support	.044	.015

Standardized coefficients

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

## 2. Data and results

	Job quality	Hourly income
Job search support	.085*	.126***
Instrumental job search support	.053	.131**
Expressive job search support	.044	.015

Standardized coefficients

\* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ; \*\*\* $p \leq .001$

## 2. Data and results

From:	Perceived availability of:	Job quality	Hourly income
Immediate family	Job search support	.072°	.085*
	Instrumental job search support	.029	.140**
	Expressive job search support	.052	-.040
Extended family	Job search support	.060°	.040
	Instrumental job search support	.010	.085°
	Expressive job search support	.055	-.040
Friends	Job search support	.001	.033
	Instrumental job search support	-.043	.033
	Expressive job search support	.042	.025
Acquaintances	Job search support	-.048	.050
	Instrumental job search support	-.070	.050
	Expressive job search support	.014	-.050

Standardized coefficients with ° $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ;  $p \leq .001$



## 2. Data and results

From:	Perceived availability of:	Job quality	Hourly income
Immediate family	Job search support	.072°	.085*
	Instrumental job search support	.029	.140**
	Expressive job search support	.052	-.040
Extended family	Job search support	.060°	.040
	Instrumental job search support	.010	.085°
	Expressive job search support	.055	-.040
Friends	Job search support	.001	.033
	Instrumental job search support	-.043	.033
	Expressive job search support	.042	.025
Acquaintances	Job search support	-.048	.050
	Instrumental job search support	-.070	.050
	Expressive job search support	.014	-.050

Standardized coefficients with ° $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ;  $p \leq .001$

## 2. Data and results

From:	Perceived availability of:	Job quality	Hourly income
Immediate family	Job search support	.072°	.085*
	Instrumental job search support	.029	.140**
	Expressive job search support	.052	-.040
Extended family	Job search support	.060°	.040
	Instrumental job search support	.010	.085°
	Expressive job search support	.055	-.040
Friends	Job search support	.001	.033
	Instrumental job search support	-.043	.033
	Expressive job search support	.042	.025
Acquaintances	Job search support	-.048	.050
	Instrumental job search support	-.070	.050
	Expressive job search support	.014	-.050

Standardized coefficients with ° $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ;  $p \leq .001$

## 2. Data and results

From:	Perceived availability of:	Job quality	Hourly income
Immediate family	Job search support	.072°	.085*
	Instrumental job search support	.029	.140**
	Expressive job search support	.052	-.040
Extended family	Job search support	.060°	.040
	Instrumental job search support	.010	.085°
	Expressive job search support	.055	-.040
Friends	Job search support	.001	.033
	Instrumental job search support	-.043	.033
	Expressive job search support	.042	.025
Acquaintances	Job search support	-.048	.050
	Instrumental job search support	-.070	.050
	Expressive job search support	.014	-.050

Standardized coefficients with ° $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ;  $p \leq .001$

## 2. Data and results

From:	Perceived availability of:	Job quality	Hourly income
Immediate family	Job search support	.072°	.085*
	Instrumental job search support	.029	.140**
	Expressive job search support	.052	-.040
Extended family	Job search support	.060°	.040
	Instrumental job search support	.010	.085°
	Expressive job search support	.055	-.040
Friends	Job search support	.001	.033
	Instrumental job search support	-.043	.033
	Expressive job search support	.042	.025
Acquaintances	Job search support	-.048	.050
	Instrumental job search support	-.070	.050
	Expressive job search support	.014	-.050

Standardized coefficients with ° $p \leq .10$ ; \* $p \leq .05$ ; \*\* $p \leq .01$ ;  $p \leq .001$

## Social support as a form of social capital?

- Theoretically? YES
- Empirically? YES
  - Social resource proposition
  - Strength of ties proposition

# Next steps

- To be explored:
  - Interaction with the stressfulness of the job search?
  - Received job search support?
  - Social or ethnic inequality in job search support?
  
- Data:
  - Representative population
  - Real jobs
  - Longitudinal data
  
- Measures:
  - Alternatives for the volume of the support items?

# QUESTIONS?

[pieterpaul.verhaeghe@ugent.be](mailto:pieterpaul.verhaeghe@ugent.be)  
<http://www.psw.ugent.be/HeDeRa/>